

# Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 8 Number 1 • January 2002

## Our January Meeting

The January 13 AFS meeting will feature AFS member **Ram Avtar**, who will speak on life in India and Hinduism. Ram was born and raised in India, and has much to share on India's people and culture.

Please join us before the 1:00 program for socializing. If you're able, please bring some snacks to share with the group. After the meeting, we'll have lunch at the Folks restaurant on Holcomb Bridge Road. Folks is on the right side of the road as you go toward I-400, just after the Olive Garden.

The **AFS Center** is at Suite 500, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, in Roswell, GA. To get there, take I-400 north from Atlanta past I-285 by 8 miles to Exit 7B, which is GA-140. Take GA-140 (Holcomb Bridge Road) west about 1 mile and turn left at Grimes Bridge Road. Go 0.2 miles to 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, which is on the right.

## Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the AFS Center at 12:30 on January 27 for a very important election meeting. HGA is looking for new people to fill officer and board positions. For details, see [www.geocities.com/gahumanists](http://www.geocities.com/gahumanists).

## Fellowship of Reason Meeting

The **Fellowship of Reason** will meet at 12:30 PM on February 6 at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Highway in Atlanta. For details, see [www.kindreason.com](http://www.kindreason.com).

## Larry Darby Runs for Attorney General

Congratulations to AFS member Larry Darby, who is now running for Attorney General for the State of Alabama on the Libertarian Party ticket. (Larry is also the Alabama State Director for American Atheists.) For more information on his candidacy, see Larry's election website at [www.angelfire.com/al4/larrydarby/](http://www.angelfire.com/al4/larrydarby/).

"It must be borne in mind that the tragedy of life does not lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy of life lies in having no goal to reach." — Benjamin E. Mays

Save money on long distance and help AFS! There is no monthly fee; calls are 40 cents for up to 10 minutes, and 4 cents per minute thereafter. Dial **10-15-335-1**-area code-number. At the prompt, enter the AFS code: **215152**.

## AFS Activities

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet on Sunday, January 20, from 4 to 6 PM at the AFS Center.

The **AFS Game Night** will be on Friday, January 25 at 7:00 PM. Activities may include Scrabble, Boggle, Bridge, poetry reading and/or discussion.

For info on above activities, call Alice Leitner, 404-255-1187.

## The AFS Social

The **AFS Social** will be at Las Margaritas Restaurant at 1842 Cheshire Bridge Road (Atlanta) on Friday, January 18, at 7:00 PM. Please RSVP to Steve Yothment at 770-339-8394 or send email to [steveyoth@aol.com](mailto:steveyoth@aol.com).

To get there from the north, take I-85 to the Cheshire Bridge Road exit (Exit 88). Turn left at the light and go about 1.5 miles. The restaurant will be on the right.

To get there from the south, take Piedmont Rd. north to Cheshire Bridge Road. Turn right at Cheshire Bridge Road and go about 0.5 miles. The restaurant will be on the left.

## Meetings and Activities

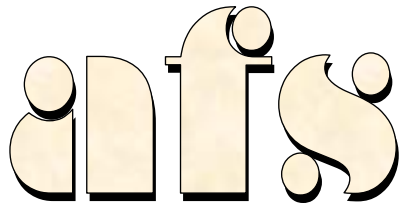
- Jan 13: AFS General Meeting at AFS Center, 1:00 PM.
- Jan 18: AFS Social, Las Margaritas Restaurant, 7:00 PM.
- Jan 20: AFS Discussion Group at AFS Center, 4:00 PM.
- Jan 25: AFS Game Night at AFS Center, 7:00 PM.
- Jan 27: AFS Board Meeting at AFS Center, 11:00 AM.
- Jan 27: Humanists of Georgia at AFS Center, 12:30 PM.
- Feb 6: Fellowship of Reason meets at NUUC, 12:30 PM.

## Go to the AFS Center on MARTA

To go to the AFS Center on Atlanta's public transit system, get on any MARTA train and take it to the North Springs Station on the North Line. Then, walk to the bus stop and get on Bus 85, which leaves every half hour on the hour. Get off the bus at the Holcomb Bridge/Alpharetta Highway stop. Walk 2 blocks east on Holcomb Bridge Road and then 1 block south on Grimes Bridge Road to 1170 Grimes Bridge Road.

For the return trip, walk back to the bus stop and catch Bus 85 southbound. It comes by every half hour on the hour. The bus returns to the North Springs Station so that you can get back on the train.

Train and bus fare is \$1.75 each time.



**Atlanta  
Freethought  
Society**

## Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at the AFS Center, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Roswell, GA, unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

Jan 13: AFS member Ram Avtar will discuss life in India and Hinduism.

Feb 10: AFS member Reggie Finley will speak on "My Experiences as a Psychic for the Psychic Network." Reggie is well known as the Internet Infidel and has a popular internet radio show called "Live with the Internet Infidel." For details, see <http://www.infidelguy.com>.

Mar 10: Andrea Lynn Steele, author of *Your Preacher May Not Want You To Read This*, will speak on "Raising Independent Thinkers." (Read about her book at <http://www.yourpreacher.com>.)

Apr 14: TBD

Join the AFS Forum e-mail list by sending a blank message to [afs-forum-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:afs-forum-subscribe@yahoo.com). Join the AFS Announcements list by sending a blank message to [afs-announce-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:afs-announce-subscribe@yahoo.com). To unsubscribe, send a blank email to [afs-forum-unsubscribe](mailto:afs-forum-unsubscribe) or [afs-announce-unsubscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:afs-announce-unsubscribe@yahoo.com).

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of freethinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists. We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about the advantages of living life free of religious dogma through speeches, debates, discussions, protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available.

We define freethought as "the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief."

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or, especially, lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion, primarily through having a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs and by maintaining and using our own extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other's company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to us are tax deductible.

Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

**Atlanta Freethought News  
an AFS publication**

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Steve Yothment

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For membership and subscription  
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# 200 Years and Counting: Thomas Jefferson's Famous Letter Declaring a "Wall of Separation between Church and State"

By Ed Buckner, Executive Director, Council for Secular Humanism  
From *The Secular Humanist Bulletin* for Winter 2001/2002

It would probably startle and infuriate Thomas Jefferson to learn that, even after 200 years, his letter to the Baptists of Danbury, Connecticut, is still controversial and often misused and abused. That letter, dated 1 January 1802, was the one that declared that the "whole American people" had erected a "wall of separation between Church and State" by adopting the First Amendment. (The letter is reprinted in full below.)

Jefferson sent his letter as President only after having the U.S. Attorney General (Levi Lincoln, who was assuredly no John Ashcroft) and others review it. Jefferson intended the letter to explain and reaffirm his views on religious liberty and the Constitution. Those views firmly supported a strict separation, though at the time only with regard to the federal government. Jefferson sent his letter in response to an October 1801 letter from a Baptist congregation that urged him to defend a constitutionally mandated strict separation of church and state. (Connecticut and several other States did not have religious liberty at the time.)

Those who have claimed that Jefferson's letter did not support strict separation of church and state are completely rebutted by Jefferson's own words, in that letter and in other writings. Some of those claims are persistent even if unfounded and deserve to be refuted.

There are those who present (and then "defeat") a false, straw-man claim that the famous letter was not anti-religious, and that it must therefore have been *pro*-religious. Jefferson never sought to establish *the government* as in any sense anti-religious or anti-clerical, though his own personal letters demonstrate repeatedly that he had little personal respect for the clergy and churches of the day. For example, he wrote, "The clergy, by

getting themselves established by law and ingrafted into the machine of government, have been a very formidable engine against the civil and religious rights of man" (as quoted by Saul K. Padover in *Thomas Jefferson on Democracy*, 1946, p. 165). He also wrote, "In every country and every age, the priest has been hostile to liberty. He is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own. It is easier to acquire wealth and power by this combination than by deserving them, and to effect this, they have perverted the purest religion ever preached to man into mystery and jargon, unintelligible to all mankind, and therefore the safer for their purposes" (letter to Horatio Spofford, 1814). Jefferson declared of the French, "The clergy and nobles, by their privileges and influence, have kept their property in a great measure

untaxed hitherto. They then remain to be squeezed, and no agent is powerful enough for this but the people. The court therefore must ally itself with the people." (From a letter to Richard Price from Paris, 8 January 1789. From Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. 14, Princeton University Press, 1958, p. 422.) One final example of Jefferson's disdain for religion and the clergy: "History I believe furnishes no example of a priest-ridden people maintaining a free civil government. This marks the lowest grade of ignorance, of which their political as well as religious leaders will always avail themselves for their own purpose." (Letter to Baron von Humboldt, 1813.)

Another claim is that Jefferson was only concerned about entangling the federal government and religion, implying he approved of aid to religion from State governments. Charles

To Nehemiah Dodge and Others.  
A Committee of the Danbury Baptist Association,  
in the State of Connecticut

Washington, January 1, 1802

GENTLEMEN: The affectionate sentiments of esteem and approbation which you are so good as to express towards me, on behalf of the Danbury Baptist Association, give me the highest satisfaction. My duties dictate a faithful and zealous pursuit of my constituents, and in proportion as they are persuaded of my fidelity to those duties, the discharge becomes more and more pleasing.

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies between a man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith and worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church and State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.

I reciprocate your kind prayers for protection and blessing of the common Father and Creator of man, and tender you for yourselves and your religious association, assurance of my high respect and esteem.

Thomas Jefferson

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## Thomas Jefferson's Famous Letter (*continued*)

Colson, the Nixon aide who became famous in the Watergate scandal and then launched a career with Prison Ministries, cites allegedly scholarly proof of this in a Web article. The Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, that Jefferson wrote and James Madison guided through the Virginia legislature, along with Jefferson's letters, conclusively prove otherwise. Included in that state law are these words of Jefferson's: "That no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge or affect their civil capacities." Jefferson's bill became law on January 16, 1786. (From Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. 2, Princeton University Press, 1950, pp. 545-547.) Jefferson was prouder of having written this bill than of being the third President or of such history-making accomplishments as the Louisiana Purchase. He wrote, as his own full epitaph, "Here was buried Thomas Jefferson, Author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, And Father of the University of Virginia." Edwin S. Gaustad in *Faith of Our Fathers: Religion and the New Nation* (1987), p. 49, wrote, "He [Jefferson] rejoiced with John Adams when the Congregational church was finally disestablished in Connecticut in 1818; welcoming 'the resurrection of Connecticut to light and liberty,' Jefferson congratulated Adams 'that this den of priesthood is at length broken up, and that a protestant popedom is no longer to disgrace American history and character.'"

Jefferson also almost certainly did not, as some Christian-nation mythologists have claimed, give a speech or

write a letter asserting that the wall was intended to be only a one-way wall, protecting churches from government but not vice versa. The alleged Jeffersonian words were "That wall is a one directional wall. It keeps the government from running the church but it makes sure that Christian principles will always stay in government." That purported wording is repeated by many Christian-nation mythmakers, but *no* evidence at all can be found for it, and it is wildly inconsistent with extensive writings known with certainty to be Jefferson's. Jefferson once called himself a "real Christian" (letter to Charles Thompson, 9 January 1816), but he also made it quite clear that he meant by that only that he admired Jesus as a man. Jefferson wrote (letter to William Short, 31 October 1819), for example, that he did *not* believe in "The immaculate conception of Jesus, his deification, the creation of the world by him, his miraculous powers, his resurrection and visible ascension, his corporeal presence in the Eucharist, the Trinity; original sin, atonement, regeneration, election, orders of the Hierarchy, etc." Two days before his 80th birthday, Jefferson added a bit more about what he did *not* believe about Jesus in one of his famous letters to John Adams: "And the day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter. . . . But we may hope that the dawn of reason and freedom of thought in these United States will do away [with] all this artificial scaffolding." (11 April 1823, as quoted by E. S. Gaustad, "Religion," in Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Thomas Jefferson: A Reference Biography*, 1986, p. 287.)

Those who want to pretend that Jefferson's commitment to liberty is a limited (pro-religious or pro-Christian or "one-directional") commitment are clearly mistaken. But anyone, of whatever religious or irreligious view, who wants religious liberty protected will

join in celebrating in 2002 the bicentennial of Thomas Jefferson's famous letter to the Danbury Baptists.

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### Sources for more information:

Boston, Rob. "Sects, Lies, and Videotape," *Church and State*, April 1993.

Boston, Rob, *Why the Religious Right is Wrong About Separation of Church and State*, Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1993.

Boyd, Julian P., ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950 (various years for different volumes).

Buckner, Edward M. and Michael E. Buckner, *Quotations That Support the Separation of State and Church*, 2nd Edition, Roswell, GA: Atlanta Free-thought Society, 1995.

Kramnick, Isaac and R. Laurence Moore, *The Godless Constitution: The Case Against Religious Correctness*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996.

Menendez, Albert and Edd Doerr, compilers, *The Great Quotations on Religious Freedom*, Long Beach, CA: Centerline Press, 1991.

Seldes, George, ed., *The Great Quotations*, Secaucus, New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1983.

<http://members.tripod.com/~candst/tnppage/arg3.htm> (on refutation of the "one-directional" claim)

<http://www.khouse.org/articles/political/20000501-219.html> (Colson's claims)

<http://w3.trib.com/FACT/1st.jeffers.2.html> (complete copy of the letter from the Danbury Baptists to Jefferson and his reply)

<http://www.usconstitution.net/jeffwall.html> (another copy of Jefferson's letter, showing his original spelling, etc.)

<http://www.chuckbaldwinlive.com/jefferson.html> (copy of *Washington Times* article reporting on alleged limited, political nature of Jefferson's letter)

<http://www.thevrwc.org/historical/JeffersonWall.html> (site that claims Jefferson meant otherwise in his letter and was really pro-religious)

<http://www.atheists.org/flash.line/jeff1.htm> (report on the American Atheists site, refuting recent claims of Jefferson's pro-religious intentions)

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# Freethought News

## 14.1% HAVE NO RELIGION

The 2001 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS 2001) released recently by The Graduate Center of the City University of New York showed that 52% of adults in America are Protestant, 24.5% are Catholic, and 14.1% adhere to no religion. Those giving their religion as Jewish were 1.3% and those as Muslim or Islamic were 0.5%.

With a sample of over 50,000 randomly selected respondents aged 18 or over, ARIS 2001 is the most comprehensive portrait of religious identification in the U.S. today.

Of particular note was that the category of people that claimed "no religion" was 14.1% in 2001, compared to 8.1% in 1990. The "no religion" category included atheists, agnostics, humanists and secularists, as well as those who responded "no religion."

The percentage of Christians in America (age 18 or older) was 76.5% in 2001, compared to 86.3% in 1990.

You can find the complete survey at [www.gc.cuny.edu/folio/index.htm](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/folio/index.htm). (At the bottom of the webpage, enter the word "survey" in the search dialogue box.)

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## WALLBANGER 2001 AWARD

American Atheists announced on January 3 that Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore was the recipient of its annual Wallbanger Award, with Sen. Joseph Lieberman coming in at a tight second place.

The Atheist civil rights organization presents the annual award to that individual or group doing the most to undermine the "wall of separation" between church and state spoken of by Thomas Jefferson and other Founders of the Republic.

Moore clinched the award when he ordered the stealth placement, under cover of night, of an enormous 5,280-pound granite monument to the Ten Commandments in the Alabama Judicial Building. "This action illustrates Judge Moore's utter contempt for the constitutional separation of govern-

ment and religion," declared Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists. "No Atheist, freethinker, or even members of non-Christian creeds can feel welcome in Moore's courtroom because of his intolerant action."

Sen. Joseph Lieberman received second place in the Wallbanger Awards for his scheme to use public funds in order to repair and renovate "historic" churches.

Tied for third place, and thus deserving Dishonorable Mention are televangelists Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, for blaming the terrorist attacks of September 11 on gays, nonbelievers, women seeking abortions and other alleged ne'er-do-wells.

[From the American Atheists website, [www.americanatheists.org](http://www.americanatheists.org).]

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## ACLU SUES OVER PRAYER BREAKFAST

Acting on behalf of five East Point residents, the American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia filed suit in federal court on January 3 against Mayor Patsy Joe Hilliard and the City of East Point for their unconstitutional sponsorship, promotion and funding of the East Point Mayor's Annual Prayer Breakfast. (East Point is a suburb of Atlanta.)

"East Point's prayer breakfast is an extreme example of a city government choosing one religion over all others and making non-Protestant members of the community feel like outsiders in their own city," said Debbie Seagraves, Executive Director of the ACLU of Georgia. "In a city as diverse as East Point, and at a time when our nation is struggling for unity, I would hope that the mayor would understand that this is a divisive thing to do."

Each year's prayer breakfast has intertwined politics and religion under the cloak of city government sponsorship, the ACLU said in its complaint. Last year's prayer breakfast, for example, included a "litany" by the Mayor quoting "the words of King Solomon." The Mayor and other city officials asked Jesus Christ for his

blessing, his "vision" and "wisdom."

And for the last six years, employees of East Point have designed, prepared and printed the fliers to promote the official prayer breakfast, working on city time and using the city's own letterhead. City funds are used to help pay for the event, and private donations are made to the city itself. The mayor promotes the event on official stationery, and employs the city's director of finance to disburse funds through public accounts.

"Numerous residents complained to the ACLU and we tried to work with the mayor to ensure that the prayer breakfast could move forward without government sponsorship or entanglement, but the mayor simply refused," said Gerry Weber, Legal Director of the ACLU of Georgia.

The ACLU's lawsuit seeks a court order to prevent this year's prayer breakfast from taking place. A hearing on the matter was scheduled for Monday, January 7th at 3:00 p.m. ACLU cooperating attorneys Frank Derrickson and Ralph Goldberg represent the residents.

[From the ACLU of Georgia website, [www.acluga.org](http://www.acluga.org).]

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## MAYO CLINIC STUDY SHOWS NO EFFECT FROM PRAYER

A six-month study conducted by the prestigious Mayo Clinic has found that prayer had no effect on rates of death, heart attacks, strokes or hospitalizations.

The study was directed by cardiologist Dr. Stephen L. Kopecky, and was conducted between July, 1997 and October, 1999. Results were released in the current issue of the Mayo Clinic Proceedings. A statement from the Clinic said that researchers "found that...intercessory prayer had no significant effect on patients' medical outcomes after hospitalization in a coronary care unit."

Kopecky's team followed 799 male and female patients aged 18 years or older. The survey was described as a "single-center, randomized, double-

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# Freethought News (continued)

blind, controlled trial.”

“We sought to improve on the design of earlier studies of intercessory prayer through the application of standard experimental methods with the hope of obtaining scientific evidence to elucidate the potential role of intercessory prayer in medical care,” said Kopecky.

Patients were randomly placed into an “intercessory prayer group” and a control group. Those in the first group were prayed for at least once a week for 26 weeks by a prayer-team of five people. “No significant differences were found between the intercessory prayer group and the control group,” noted the Mayo Clinic team.

The findings add to a growing debate among religious leaders, scientists, health-care workers and even public policy makers about the role of spirituality in physical well being. Nearly 1,200 studies have attempted to examine the effects of prayer, and even Kopecky suggested that some forms of religious involvement and spirituality are linked to healthier lives. One possible explanation, though, suggests that benefits occur not because of the intervention of a cosmic deity exchanging medical outcomes for prayer, but rather the fact that when people pray, they are often relaxed and have lower blood pressure. Indeed, some have pointed to the benefits of laughter as a source of potential medical benefit.

“Although the relationship between religious involvement and spirituality and health outcomes seems valid (in some studies),” said Dr. Paul S. Mueller of the Mayo Clinic, “it is difficult to establish causality. The benefits of religious and spiritual involvement are likely conveyed through complex psychosocial, behavioral and biological processes that are incompletely understood.”

For those who argue that intercessory prayer and other spiritual practices benefit health due to the intervention of supernatural beings, the Mayo Clinic study offers little sanctu-

ary. “Researchers could discern no scientifically significant differences” between groups of patients who received prayer, and those who did not. Fully 25.6% in the prayer group even suffered “negative outcomes” such as death, heart attack, rehospitalization or a trip to the emergency room.

[From American Atheist Newsletter #988. See [www.americanatheists.org](http://www.americanatheists.org) for a copy of the 12/18/01 newsletter.]

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## ATHEIST FILES SUIT CLAIMING WRONGFUL TERMINATION

An article by Matthew Lane in the Kingsport (Tennessee) Times-News on December 27 says that Carletta Sims, the Tennessee director of American Atheists, is suing her former employer, Associates Commerce Solutions, claiming the company fired her because she is an atheist. Carletta filed the lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Greeneville naming ACS as the defendant.

Carletta began working at the ACS facility on June 21, 2000. She was placed at the Gray facility by Snelling Personnel Services and was classified as a temporary employee. In July 2000 during a break at ACS, two female co-workers apparently learned that she was an atheist and became openly hostile toward her. “They commented how their father, a local Baptist minister, would be upset if he learned they had talked to Sims,” the complaint states. Two days later, she returned from a work break and noticed that a sketched likeness of Jesus Christ had been taped to her computer monitor. “When (she) showed the taped sketch to one of her supervisors, the supervisor remarked: ‘How nice,’” the complaint states. “Sims responded that it might not be that nice since she was an atheist.”

On July 18, ACS terminated her position. Carletta claims an agent of Snelling carried ACS’s message to her and advised her that the temporary position was no longer available. She was unable to locate comparable employment for months and has not

been able to secure any regular permanent employment in the area.

“In the meantime, other individuals who began as temporary employees with ACS have become permanent employees with the company,” the complaint states. She claims that ACS terminated her from her position because she is an atheist, because she offended fundamental religious employees by her presence, and because she objected to having a religious figure’s likeness being taped to her computer monitor. “In order to cover up its discriminatory and retaliatory termination, ACS has claimed that Sims created a disruption at work,” the complaint states. She is asking for \$250,000 in compensatory damages and reinstatement to a permanent position.

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## NEW YAHOO GROUP TO STOP AA 12-STEP PROGRAM

A new Yahoo group has been set up to help stop the 12-step Alcoholics Anonymous program. 12-Step Coercion Watch is a discussion group for those concerned about the violations of religious liberty that result when US courts or employers require treatment in such a program. In the United States more than a million people each year are forced into these program.

Two federal circuit courts (Second and Seventh Circuits) and two state supreme courts (Tennessee and New York) have ruled this practice to be in violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, yet the coercion continues throughout the country and also in other countries.

The discussions will focus on planning and initiating organizational efforts to end 12-Step coercion worldwide. Discussions will include advise for those now being coerced, encouragement to file lawsuits and information on how to find legal assistance.

For details, go to [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com), click on “Groups” and enter the group name “12-Step\_Coercion\_Watch.”

# CAMP QUEST 2002

Camp Quest, the secular summer camp, is now accepting registrations from prospective campers, and applications for unpaid staff positions, for Camp Quest 2002.

This will be our 7th consecutive year of operation.

Camp Quest is the first residential summer camp in the history of the United States for the children of secular humanists, humanists, freethinkers, atheists, etc.

Camp Quest was started by the Free Inquiry Group, Inc. (FIG) of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky, and has been operated continuously by FIG since 1996.

With the blessings (pardon us—approval) of FIG, **Camp Quest has recently become an independent national humanist organization in its own right**, with a board of directors drawn from several different national freethought organizations. Most of the board members have worked as staff at Camp Quest.

This year we have a new location: YMCA Camp Campbell Gard, near Overpeck, Ohio.

The dates are **June 22<sup>nd</sup> to June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2002**. Staff arrive June 21<sup>st</sup>.

**BIG NEWS:** There is now another CampQuest: **Camp Quest of the Smoky Mountains**. It is near Knoxville, Tennessee, in the Smoky Mountain National Forest, and is fully approved by Camp Quest. It is the first of a number of Camp Quests we hope to set up across the United States. It is made possible, in part, by a grant from the Institute for Humanist Studies (IHS). The dates for the first year of Camp Quest of the Smoky Mountains are June 1<sup>st</sup> to June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2002.

Yes, you can attend either or both camps. Each will be similar and each will be different.

The fee for either camp is \$550 for one camper, and \$500 for each additional sibling from the same family unit. Ages are 8 to 13 for campers, and 14 to 17 for our Counselor in Training (CIT) program. Same fees for either program. Minimum age for staff is 18.

Apply early to avoid disappointment for a camp experience that combines reason, science, and critical inquiry with such traditional camp things as swimming, crafts, nature study, and camp food.

The two invisible unicorns are still there—with a prize, as yet unclaimed, of a godless \$100 bill for any camper who

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**2002 C.E. is:**

A year the messiah will not return

**The second year of this Century**

**The second year of this Millennium**

*The seventh year of Camp Quest*

the secular summer camp

(Started by the Free Inquiry Group, Inc.)

*It's beyond belief!*

**Dates: June 21<sup>st</sup> to June 29<sup>th</sup>**

**Place (different location from last year):**  
YMCA Camp Campbell Gard, (near Overpeck, Ohio)

\*\*\*\*\*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:**

**Camp Quest**  
**P.O. Box 264**  
**Union, KY 41091**

**Phone: 859-384-2324/ Fax: 859-384-7324/ E-mail: [CampQuest2@aol.com](mailto:CampQuest2@aol.com)**

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can prove they aren't there. Are they going to be at the new camp as well? Better ask, or, better yet, come find out.

Edwin Kagin  
Director, Camp Quest

Here is contact information on this truly unique experience:

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E-mail: [CampQuest2@aol.com](mailto:CampQuest2@aol.com)  
<http://www.Camp-Quest.com>

and / or

**Camp Quest of the Smoky Mountains**  
c/o Aleta Ledendecker  
2123 Stoneybrook Road  
Louisville, TN 37777  
Phone: (865) 982-8687  
or (865) 970-4322  
E-mail: [aletail@aol.com](mailto:aletail@aol.com)

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# Clipped

## Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

We can't include all letters-to-the-editor by AFS Members; there are too many of them! But here are a few notable letters... Charlie George's letter was in the *Times of Acadiana* on December 5<sup>th</sup>; Adam Butler's letter was in the *Huntsville Times* on January 1<sup>st</sup>.

### Sophistry and Smokescreen to Be Expected

Not that I would expect anything other than smokescreen and sophistry from a politician, I nevertheless must take issue with Sen. Cain's letter (Letters to the Editor: We Can Find the Strength We Need in Prayer, Nov. 14). This letter attempts to build a case for school prayer on the dubious assertions that humans are fundamentally too weak to cope on our own and that the founding fathers were Christian. In fact, most were deists and did not believe in the divinity of Jesus, nor in organized religion.

To compound the error, he cites existing violations of the separation of church and state such as the president, governor, Congress, etc., calling us to prayer as arguments for further violations. We mustn't allow him to exploit this slippery slope away from religious liberty.

Naturally, Sen. Cain is trying to hide what we all know to be the core of the school prayer issue. There still is and always will be prayer in schools, as long as there are Christians. The fundamentalists claim we have taken away their religious freedoms, as if they aren't allowed to pray. They even claim we have taken God out of school and public life. This is absurd. How could anyone take God anywhere? Surely, He dwells in our hearts, not our halls.

Jesus taught that we ought to pray in private. Do we believe God cannot hear our internal prayers, that he favors the false piety exhibited by self-righteous politicians?

What the fundamentalists obviously want is to force their religion on all citizens at an early and impressionable age. Public schools, funded by the tax dollars of Christians and non-Christians alike, must not advocate specific religious beliefs through coercive prayer.

Charlie George  
Alpharetta, GA

### Modern Biblical literalists

What would the United States look like as a theocracy? Biblical literalist Todd Thuss (Dec. 24 letter "No equivalence") gives us a pretty good idea.

Genocide? No problem if the victims are of a politically incorrect religion. As Thuss said, "the Old Testament's 'genocide' . . . commands sprung not from interpretation of Scripture or culture, but often from direct auditory orders during a special time in history. I challenge any person to consider defying such a charge so delivered."

In other words, it is not a sin to murder innocent women and children if you think God told you to. In fact, it is a sin not to.

Tragically, this idea has worked over and over again in Christian persecutions by Constantine, the Crusades, the Inquisition, tens of thousands of witch trials and many others. The overwhelming majority of victims were Christians. The persecutors sincerely believed they were compassionately saving and protecting souls with the sword, noose, stake and gun.

None of their prey found any protection in the belief that the Old Testament God had changed his violent ways. The New Testament says, "Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever."

Most modern Biblical literalists are kind, moral individuals. That we see an otherwise nice person attempt to justify genocide provides a frightening contemporary assurance that history will repeat itself if they ever gain unfettered civil power to effect their self-perceived divine will.

Adam Butler  
Birmingham, AL

Larry Darby's letter was in the (Montgomery) *Times Daily* on December 9th.

### Look ahead, not back

Not since the dark days of the McCarthy era have Americans suffered such a great loss of religious freedom. During the 1950s "under God" was inserted into the pledge of allegiance and "One Nation Under God" replaced the genuine American motto, *E pluribus unum*.

Recent encroachments against liberty include Judge Roy Moore's holy rock being placed in Alabama's state judicial building and President George Bush's various faith-based initiatives, both of which clearly undermine the constitutional principle of separation of religion from government.

Theism is our national religion.

But there is a silver lining to the dark cloud of entanglement of religion and government forced on Americans by politicians like Moore and Bush, especially since the faith-based terrorist attacks of Sept. 11.

Atheism and the philosophy of modern materialism are gaining wider acceptance across America, even in Alabama!

The latest American Religious Identification Survey shows significant growth in that segment of the population "identifying with no religion." Nearly 30 million or 14.1 percent of Americans identify "with no religion."

Theism is based on rudimentary writings of folklore stemming from the Bronze and Iron Ages, propagated by priestcraft.

We need government leaders who look forward, not backward.

Larry Darby  
Alabama director, American Atheists Inc.  
Montgomery, AL



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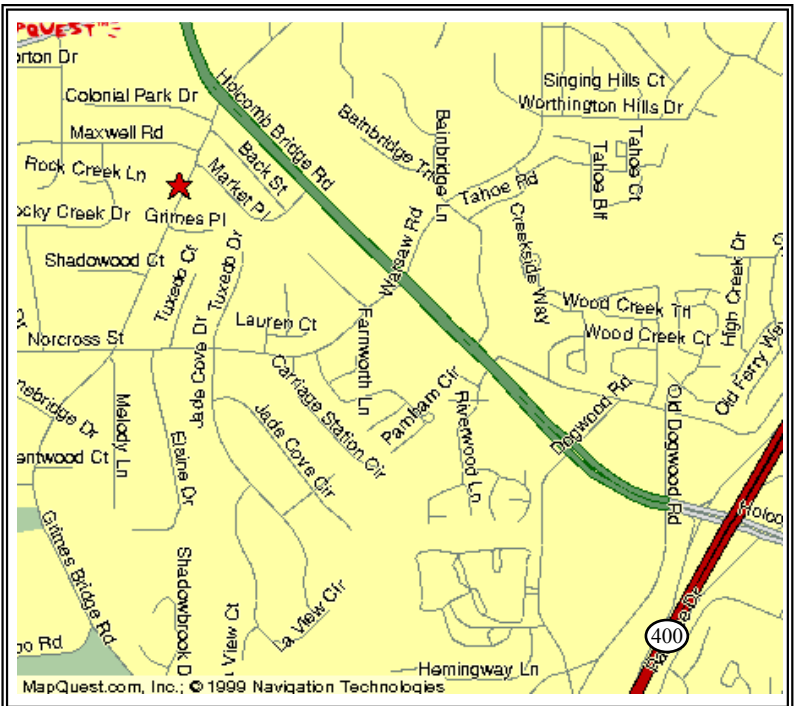
"Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded prospect" - James Madison, 1774

<p><b>Why I Am Not A Christian — \$9</b></p> <p>Lucid, comprehensive, engaging answer to Christian apologists by Keith Parsons. Respectful but devastating to all Christian claims. Wonderful follow-up to Bertrand Russell's great essay with the same title.</p>
<p><b>Tales of the Rational: Skeptical Essays About Nature and Science — \$17</b></p> <p>Massimo Pigliucci's essays examine and criticize both religion and science. He defends straw men, attacks creationism, and explains why scientists and other skeptics should be nontheists.</p>
<p><b>An Uppity Old Atheist Woman's Dictionary — \$10</b></p> <p>By Carol Faulkenberry (illustrated by Amanda Faulkenberry); like Ambrose Bierce's <i>Devil's Dictionary</i>—but better: more biting, funnier. Guaranteed to make you laugh out loud and to challenge at least one idea you hold.</p>
<p><b>Bible Bloopers: Evidence That Demands a Verdict, Too! (A Skeptic Answers Josh McDowell) — \$15</b></p> <p>Mike Ledo's funny, scholarly book—over 270 pp. of effective dissection of biblical mythology, explanations of Bible contradictions, and detailed background on historical, mythological perspectives for modern Christianity.</p>
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**The January Meeting:  
Sunday, January 13  
1:00 noon at AFS Center  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road,  
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:  
Ram Avtar**



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